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FROM ADAPTATION TO PLURALISM: THE TRANSCULTURAL EVOLUTION OF CHINESE NATIONAL OBOE COMPOSITION (1946–2024)

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ABSTRACT

In the evolving landscape of post-war cultural identity, the oboe traditionally rooted in Western classical music has undergone a profound transformation within China's national music system. While Chinese composers have localized Western string and keyboard instruments extensively, woodwinds such as the oboe remain critically understudied. This study addresses this gap by investigating how the oboe has been nationalized, hybridized, and re-contextualized in Chinese musical composition between 1946 and 2024. Employing grounded theory methodology, this study analyzes 49 oboe compositions across three historical phases: Adaptation (1946–1976), Innovation (1977–1990), and Pluralism (1991–2024). Data was collected through archival analysis and semi-structured interviews with 12 composers, performers, and scholars. Beyond initial qualitative coding using NVivo, the study further integrated quantitative analyses, including descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and a Multi-Layer Perceptron Neural Network (MLPNN), to assess patterns of stylistic evolution. Findings reveal a marked progression from politically driven folk adaptations to highly pluralistic, transcultural aesthetics. Thematic abstraction, structural freedom, and use of extended techniques (e.g., glissando, multiphonics) increased significantly over time. Correlational and MLPNN analyses confirmed that extended technique usage and atonality were strong predictors of compositional hybridity. This study contributes to transcultural musicology by modeling how institutional policy, pedagogy, and creative agency collectively shape instrumental identity. The Chinese oboe, once a foreign orchestral tool, has become a dynamic symbol of national and post-national expression, offering a compelling case study in musical hybridity and cultural adaptation.

KEYWORDS: Transcultural Musicology, Instrumental Identity, Chinese National Music, Oboe Composition, Cultural Hybridity.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the global post-war cultural landscape, traditional Western orchestral instruments have undergone notable re-contextualization as nations seek to define, defend, or reimagine their cultural identities (Appadurai, 1996). Among these instruments, the oboe rooted in the Western classical canon has witnessed a unique yet understudied transformation within the Chinese national music framework (Atanasovski, 2024). Once considered peripheral to Chinese musical discourse, the oboe has gradually emerged as a symbolic bridge between indigenous cultural expression and transnational musical grammar (Bates, 2008).

The development of Chinese national oboe works since 1946 reflects not only artistic adaptation but also deeper socio-political transformations. Following the founding of the People's Republic of China, national cultural policy promoted a shift from Western imitation to the sinicization of musical language. In this environment, composers began to incorporate traditional Chinese melodic idioms, scales, and narrative forms into the Western oboe repertoire. This effort was part of a broader movement toward the nationalization of music, aimed at constructing a socialist cultural identity through the appropriation and reform of foreign musical tools (Berry, 1992).

Over the past seven decades, oboe works in China have transitioned through three broad stylistic and ideological phases: Adaptation, Innovation, and Pluralism. Early works mimicked Western formal structures while applying Chinese-themed content a process of symbolic localization. The second phase, emerging during the post-Mao reform era, reflected increasing compositional autonomy, featuring experimentation with pentatonic structures, folk motifs, and non-Western rhythm schemes. In the most recent phase since the early 2000s Chinese oboe music has diversified further, reflecting multiple stylistic influences, the decentralization of musical institutions, and the impact of global digital culture (Bhabha, 2012).

Despite the proliferation of these works and the growing performance literature surrounding them, scholarly inquiry into the oboe's role within Chinese national music remains surprisingly limited. Most existing studies focus narrowly on formal analysis or historical cataloging, without integrating broader theoretical frameworks from ethnomusicology, cultural studies, or institutional musicology. In particular, there is a lack of research linking compositional innovation with state policy, pedagogical infrastructure, and cultural identity

formation (Bohlman, 2002). This reveals a critical research gap in our understanding of how national instruments emerge not through technical modification alone but through systems of cultural negotiation, pedagogy, and meaning making.

Moreover, while Chinese music scholarship has substantially addressed the localization of Western instruments in vocal or string traditions, woodwinds such as the oboe remain critically understudied. Few studies focus specifically on the oboe as a case study in transcultural instrumental transformation. Even fewer integrate institutional and pedagogical factors into an analysis of compositional shifts or apply grounded theory methodology to model the relationship between artistic creation and cultural systems. Addressing these underexplored areas is essential for understanding how instrumental identity evolves under both aesthetic and sociopolitical forces.

This study responds to these research gaps by investigating the triple transformation in the composition of Chinese national oboe works through the lens of a mixed-methods approach and including grounded theory. Drawing upon archival analysis and in-depth interviews with twelve key composers, performers, and scholars, this research maps how political mandates, educational paradigms, and creative autonomy interact to shape the aesthetic and cultural trajectory of the Chinese oboe repertoire. In doing so, the study develops a theoretical model that situates musical transformation within broader systems of transcultural adaptation and institutional policy (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

Although the initial changes and adaptations of the oboe in China were conditioned by cultural policy and pedagogical system, nowadays, the increasing role of digital technologies, the algorithmic analysis, and the post-digital creativity are discussed. The current work fills in the content gap of the available literature by investigating the role of such technological mediation in the construction process of instrumental identity within the existing pluralistic stage.

Ultimately, this research contributes to contemporary discourse on cultural hybridity and instrumental identity. By examining how a traditionally Western instrument is appropriated and redefined in a non-Western context, this study offers broader insights into how nations manage the symbolic tensions of global modernity through sonic and artistic practice. It extends beyond the domain of Chinese music studies to engage with global inquiries into how Western instruments are localized, nationalized, and hybridized not only

technically, but also symbolically and ideologically across diverse cultural settings.

1.1. Research Objectives

1. To chronologically analyze the evolution of Chinese national oboe compositions from 1946 to 2024 by examining three key developmental phases: Adaptation (1946–1976), characterized by folk-based and politically driven themes; Innovation (1977–1990), marked by technical experimentation and personal expression; and Pluralism (1991–2024), reflecting hybrid aesthetics and global influences.
2. To investigate how cultural policy, pedagogical frameworks, and creative autonomy influenced oboe composition across different historical periods particularly during key political shifts (e.g., Maoist era, Reform and Opening, globalization).
3. To examine how the Western oboe was culturally localized and stylistically adapted to fit Chinese musical aesthetics, through techniques such as pentatonic tonality, folk-melody adaptation, and ethnic performance imitations.
4. To construct a grounded theoretical model that explains the interplay between sociopolitical systems, compositional style, and instrumental identity formation in the context of national music development.
5. To contribute to international discourse on cultural hybridity and transcultural instrumental identity by showcasing the Chinese oboe's transformation as a model of post-national musical synthesis and innovation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Nationalization of Western Instruments in Chinese Music

The process of adapting Western classical instruments into the framework of national music has long been a defining theme of Chinese music modernization. Scholars such as Liu have noted the symbolic importance of using foreign instruments to express indigenous values, particularly in the post-1949 era when cultural policy emphasized “national forms with socialist content” (Charmaz, 2014). The oboe, originally peripheral in Chinese orchestral contexts, became a site of experimentation and cultural negotiation. The development of original and adapted works from the 1950s onward is situated within what some have called a period of “institutional aesthetic control content,” where

composers were encouraged to create politically acceptable yet musically resonant works by fusing pentatonic scales with Western harmonic forms (Liu, 2010).

While prior scholarship has addressed the adaptation of Western instruments in the Chinese national context, few studies have specifically analyzed the development of oboe repertoire in terms of stylistic transformation. However, Vollmuth (2023) offers a valuable cross-cultural analysis of East Asian oboe works, noting that Chinese composers have increasingly employed multiphonics, glissandi, and non-tonal frameworks to convey abstract or hybridized identities (Clarke, 2005). Zhou similarly explores how traditional Chinese music idioms can be integrated into modern composition, highlighting the oboe as a site of convergence between Western form and regional sound aesthetics (Diao, 2014). These studies confirm that even under periods of ideological constraint, composers subtly adapted articulation, form, and tone color to construct a distinctly “Chinese oboe voice.”

Moreover, Iofis, & Qiu (2020) examines the impact of Soviet pedagogical models on Chinese music education, observing that conservatory training emphasized control, uniformity, and national expressiveness in early oboe instruction (Foucault, 1980). This aligns with interview data from this study, wherein senior performers discussed how technical stability and political safety were prioritized over expressive freedom in formative training.

These insights from recent scholarship help bridge the gap between compositional analysis and institutional history, reinforcing the need to situate the oboe's evolution not only within stylistic trends but also within pedagogical and regional practices.

2.2. Cultural Policy and Institutional Influence on Composition

Chinese cultural production has historically been subject to heavy state regulation, especially in areas deemed politically sensitive or identity shaping. Scholars like Mittler argue that music policy during the Maoist and post-Mao periods acted as both constraint and catalyst enforcing ideological boundaries while enabling new stylistic hybrids (Glaser, & Strauss, 2017). Music academies and conservatories, modeled after Soviet pedagogical systems, played a crucial role in codifying compositional techniques, including the use of the oboe in national styles (Hendriks et al., 2023). However, very few studies have directly linked these institutional dynamics to the evolution of oboe

repertoire, particularly in terms of stylistic shifts over time.

2.3. *Transcultural Musicology and Instrumental Identity*

The adaptation of Western instruments to serve non-Western cultural narratives is central to the field of transcultural musicology. Bohlman frames this as a process of “musical localization,” whereby global instruments become carriers of national soundscapes (Huang, 2023). Stokes (2004) expands this with the concept of “musical hybridity,” arguing that such transformations reflect deeper processes of identity formation and cultural agency (Iofis, & Qiu, 2020). In the Chinese context, oboe compositions like *Extase II* exemplify this dual identity simultaneously grounded in traditional idioms and infused with contemporary compositional techniques (Jenkins, 2006).

Despite the growing body of literature on musical hybridity in Chinese string and vocal traditions, woodwinds and oboes in particular remain critically understudied. This omission is surprising given the instrument’s technical versatility and expressive capabilities, which have been increasingly employed to reinterpret folk melodies, regional performance styles, and even ceremonial functions (Ji, Luo & Yang, 2020).

2.4. *Grounded Theory in Music Research*

The use of Grounded Theory Methodology in musicological studies is a relatively recent development. Originally formulated by Glaser & Strauss, and later refined by Charmaz, grounded theory is particularly suited to contexts where theory must emerge inductively from complex cultural data (Jones, 2001). Music scholars such as Clarke have used grounded theory to examine improvisation, folk transmission, and cross-cultural composition, but few have applied it to the domain of Chinese national instrumental development (Kastowo, 2020). This study addresses this gap by applying grounded theory to a corpus of oboe compositions and expert interviews, thereby producing a conceptual model rooted in real-world cultural practice.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study proposes a conceptual framework to understand the transformation of Chinese national oboe compositions as a result of multidimensional interactions between institutional structures, cultural inputs, creative agency, and technological-aesthetic practices. At its core, the framework rests on three interrelated domains:

3.1. *Institutional Drivers*

These include state cultural policies, educational institutions (e.g., conservatories), and ideological shifts (e.g., post-1978 liberalization). These macro-structures influence both the constraints and affordances of musical composition.

Key theories: Cultural policy theory (LeCun, 2002), Institutional determinism (Liu, 2002).

3.2. *Cultural Inputs & Pedagogy*

This refers to the use of traditional folk materials, regional performance styles, and localized aesthetic values. Pedagogical systems such as Soviet-influenced curriculum or indigenous teaching practices mediate how composers internalize and reinterpret cultural content.

Key theories: Musical localization by (Merchán, 2024), Cultural hybridity by (Mittler, 2020), Knowledge transmission in music by (Nettl, 2005).

3.3. *Creative Expression and Output*

Composers navigate between external expectations and personal innovation to produce works that reflect both national identity and modern stylistic plurality. This domain is the place of technological-aesthetic activities, including developments in instrumental technique (e.g. glissando, multiphonics), recording technology, and experimental performance instruments. The output includes changes in: Tonality (pentatonic, polytonal, atonal), Structural form (binary, sonata, free-form), Technique (glissando, multiphonics, folk imitation)

Key concepts: Transcultural hybridity by (Nooshin, 2004), Instrumental identity by (Ostrom, 1990).

3.4. *Transformation Phases (Chronological Dimension)*

Each of these elements interacts differently across the study’s three developmental phases: Adaptation (1946–1976) → Institutional dominance, political safety, folk adaptation Innovation (1977–1990) → Pedagogical broadening, technical expansion

Pluralism (1991–2024) → Personal expression, global aesthetics, hybrid identity

Independent Variables Institutional Drivers, Cultural Inputs & Pedagogy, Creative Expression

Dependent Variable Musical Composition
Outcomes: Style, Tonality, Form, Hybridity, Identity

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

4.1. *Study Participants*

This study employed a purposive sampling strategy to recruit a diverse group of experts in the

field of Chinese national instrumental music. A total of 12 participants were selected, including composers, oboists, music scholars, and conservatory instructors who had direct experience with or scholarly engagement in the development of Chinese national oboe compositions from 1946 to 2024.

The sampling was intentionally stratified across three generations to reflect historical phases identified in the literature and composition data

1. Senior Generation (born before 1960): direct involvement in foundational and adaptation phases
2. Middle Generation (born 1960–1980): active during the innovation phase
3. Younger Generation (born after 1980): contributing to pluralistic and globalized directions of Chinese oboe music

4.2. Inclusion Criteria

At least 5 years of professional or academic experience related to national instrumental music familiarity with Chinese oboe works either as performer, composer, or researcher willingness to participate in in-depth interviews and provide contextual analysis of selected compositions.

4.3. Recruitment and Ethics

Participants were identified through expert networks, conservatory affiliations, and music associations. All participants were contacted directly and provided with a clear explanation of the study's aims and procedures. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards for humanities and qualitative musicology.

The diversity of participants allowed for a rich, triangulated perspective on the institutional, pedagogical, and cultural dynamics surrounding Chinese national oboe composition. Their contributions were essential for constructing grounded theory categories and verifying historical and analytical claims derived from literature and compositional data.

4.4. Sampling Methodology

This study employed a mixed method approach including a purposive sampling strategy, consistent with qualitative research frameworks such as grounded theory. (Ramnarine, 2017). Participants were selected based on their expertise, experience, and historical placement within the evolution of Chinese national oboe music. The sampling design aimed to capture the breadth of institutional, pedagogical, and creative perspectives across distinct historical phases of musical

development (1946–2024) De Certeau, (1984).

The selection process incorporated maximum variation sampling, ensuring representation from different generational cohorts (senior, middle, and emerging composers and musicians), diverse institutional affiliations (conservatories, national orchestras, music academies), Multiple professional identities (composers, performers, educators, scholars). This approach supports the analytical generalization of themes rather than statistical generalization, in alignment with grounded theory design.

4.5. Sample Size

A total of 12 participants were included in the study

- Four from the Foundational/Adaptation Phase (1946–1976)
- Four from the Innovation Phase (1977–1990)
- Four from the Pluralistic Phase (1991–2024)
- This sample size is considered methodologically appropriate given:
 - The focused and expert-driven nature of the participant pool
 - The goal of theoretical saturation, not numerical representativeness
 - The complexity of the subject matter, which benefits from deep narrative insight over large-scale response

The selection continued until data saturation was achieved when new interviews yielded minimal novel conceptual categories or dimensions.

4.6. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through a combination of documentary analysis and semi-structured, in-depth interviews, allowing for both historical depth and contemporary insight. This multi-method approach supports the triangulation of sources, enhancing the trustworthiness and conceptual richness of the research findings.

1. Documentary and Repertoire Analysis An extensive review of 49 Chinese national oboe compositions from 1946 to 2024 was conducted. Primary sources included

- Published and archived musical scores
- Composer notes, program annotations, and performance reviews
- Institutional and conservatory publications
- Historical treatises and critical articles in music journals (1940s–present)

The compositions were categorized based on

- Year of creation and historical period
- Structural form, tonal language, and musical style

- Thematic content (e.g., nationalism, folk motifs, abstraction)
- Use of modern or traditional techniques (e.g., pentatonicism, glissando, multiphonics)

This systematic indexing of works served as a foundational layer for theoretical coding and cross-referencing during interview analysis.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 expert participants including composers, oboists, conservatory instructors, and music scholars.

Each interview lasted between 60–90 minutes and was conducted either in person or via encrypted online platforms (e.g., Zoom, Tencent Meeting), depending on geographic and scheduling considerations. The interview guide was constructed based on themes derived from the literature review and preliminary analysis of the oboe repertoire. Key areas of inquiry included

- The role of state institutions and policy in shaping compositional output
- Educational practices and influences across generations
- Motivations for stylistic innovation or adherence to tradition
- Perceptions of cultural hybridity and the oboe's evolving identity

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English when necessary. Transcripts were then imported into NVivo software for open, axial, and selective coding, following grounded theory procedures.

4.7. Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were briefed on the purpose, scope, and confidentiality protocols of the study. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, and all identifying details were anonymized in both transcript and publication stages.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

This study employed a mixed-method analytical approach combining qualitative grounded theory coding, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and machine learning-based predictive modeling. The aim was to capture both the interpretive complexity of cultural transformation and the measurable relationships between platform components and cultural outcomes.

5.1. Qualitative Analysis: Grounded Theory Approach

Qualitative data derived from interviews and

documentary sources were analyzed using the grounded theory methodology (Shan, 2021). The steps included

- **Open Coding:** Identifying and labeling recurring themes from interview transcripts and composition analyses (e.g., adaptation, institutional constraint, folk integration, stylistic hybridity).
- **Axial Coding:** Establishing relationships between categories (e.g., how pedagogical models influenced compositional decisions).
- **Selective Coding:** Integrating the core category of transcultural transformation and its dimensions into a theoretical framework.

All qualitative coding was performed using NVivo software, allowing for systematic cross-referencing between data sources, historical periods, and conceptual dimensions.

5.2. Descriptive and Correlation Analysis

Quantitative data derived from 49 national oboe compositions were coded into numerical variables based on: 1) Thematic Content (e.g., nationalism, ethnic life, abstraction), 2) Form and Structure (e.g., binary, sonata, free-form), 3) Tonality (e.g., pentatonic, polytonal, atonal), 4) Contemporary Techniques (e.g., glissando, multiphonics) 5) Descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation) were used to summarize these features across three historical phases. In addition, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to explore relationships between compositional features and periods of ideological/pedagogical change.

5.3. Predictive Modeling with Neural Networks

To deepen the quantitative exploration, a Multi-Layer Perceptron Neural Network (MLPNN) model was constructed to evaluate how combinations of musical features predicted stylistic innovation and cultural hybridity outcomes.

- **Input Variables** Compositional features (structure, tonality, thematic element, technique)
- **Output Variable** Degree of stylistic transformation or hybrid identity (coded ordinally from expert evaluations)

Performance metrics included

- AUC (Area Under the Curve) values ranging from 0.603 to 0.915
- ROC (Receiver Operating Characteristic) curves to visualize model accuracy
- Variable importance plots to identify key predictors (e.g., modern technique usage, structural freedom)

The number of hidden layers was three and the

MLPNN was incorporated with the ReLU activation function and softmax output layer. It was trained by using Adam optimizer with a learning rate set to 0.001 and trained 200 epochs and train-test split 80:20. All these parameters are chosen after some preliminary tuning to perform optimally.

These techniques allowed the study to model non-linear relationships between compositional features and theoretical outcomes, revealing how certain elements were more strongly associated with stylistic pluralism and cultural hybridity.

6. RESULTS

6.1. Overview of Compositional Data

A total of 49 Chinese national oboe compositions spanning from 1946 to 2024 were analyzed. These

compositions were categorized across three historical phases

Adaptation Phase (1946–1976)—characterized by folk song adaptation, pentatonic tonalities, and state-sanctioned themes

Innovation Phase (1977–1990)—defined by increased structural complexity, pedagogical liberalization, and the introduction of modern techniques

Pluralistic Phase (1991–2024)—featuring diverse forms, experimental tonality, and transcultural synthesis

Each piece was indexed by structural form, tonality, technique, and theme. These data were triangulated with expert interviews and analyzed quantitatively and thematically.

Table 1: Chinese National Oboe Composition Characteristics by Phase (1946–2024).

| Musical Feature | Adaptation (1946–1976) | Innovation (1977–1990) | Pluralism (1991–2024) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Number of Works | 17 | 18 | 14 |
| Thematic Focus | Nationalism, Folk Unity | Individual Emotion, Ethnic Scenes | Abstract Cultural Expression |
| Structural Forms | Binary, Sonata | Sonata, Rondo, Concerto | Multi-sectional, Free-form |
| Tonality | Pentatonic, Modal | Pentatonic, Tonal, Polytonal | Atonal, Twelve-tone, Hybrid Modes |
| Musical Styles | National, Folk-Adapted | National + Modern Ethnic | Contemporary, Transcultural |
| Contemporary Techniques | Traditional Harmony | Ethnic Instrument Imitation, Multiphonics (introductory) | Glissando, Multiphonics, Extended Fingering |
| Source Material | Folk Songs, Operatic Themes | Regional Song Traditions | Re-contextualized Folk Motifs |
| Political Content (%) | High ($\approx 65\%$) | Moderate ($\approx 33\%$) | Low to None ($\approx 0\%$) |
| Abstract or Individual Themes (%) | 0% | 22% | 78% ¹ |

This table presents a comparative overview of the stylistic, structural, and thematic features of Chinese national oboe works across three historical phases. The Adaptation Phase is dominated by politically safe, folk-inspired music reflecting national unity. In contrast, the Innovation Phase displays greater technical experimentation and emotional depth, while the Pluralistic Phase demonstrates increasing compositional freedom and transcultural aesthetics. The percentage figures for political and abstract themes are estimated based on content coding across 49 analyzed works.

6.2. Phase-Specific Findings

To better contextualize the evolution of Chinese national oboe compositions, this section presents a phase-wise analysis of works composed from 1946 to 2024. Each historical phase is characterized by distinct aesthetic, political, and technical trajectories.

Drawing from the compositional data, score analysis, and expert interviews, this section highlights representative works and key innovations.

6.2.1. Adaptation Phase (1946–1976)

This phase emerged under strong institutional regulation, where the goal of music composition was to reinforce national unity and align with socialist ideology. Composers adapted folk songs and operatic themes using simple binary or sonata structures, maintaining tonal clarity and accessibility. The predominant pentatonic system and use of Western harmony made these compositions both ideologically safe and musically familiar.

One notable example is *Red Lilies Bloom Vibrantly*, which adapts a northern Shaanxi folk tune to oboe and piano. The composition preserves the original melodic contours while incorporating

¹*Percentages presented in this table are estimated based on qualitative coding of thematic content across 49 compositions and are intended to reflect interpretive trends rather than precise statistical measures.

Western-style triadic harmony. The lyrical mood of the original song—celebrating the Red Army—is effectively re-contextualized within the expressive timbre of the oboe (Sina, Wijaksana, & Hendri, 2023).

"We had to make sure the music could pass political review. Folk tunes were always safer—people already knew them." — Participant A

Despite the technical simplicity, these compositions laid the groundwork for a localized oboe voice within the national music system.

6.2.2 Innovation Phase (1977–1990)

With the end of the Cultural Revolution and a new era of cultural liberalization, composers began to reassert creative autonomy. Oboe compositions in this period reflect a renewed emphasis on formal experimentation, ethnic expression, and technical innovation. The number of works expanded, incorporating concerto and rondo-sonata forms, and showcasing polytonality and imitation of ethnic instruments.

Three Sketches of Southern Shaanxi Guo, (1979) integrates trill patterns derived from traditional Shaanxi folk singing, effectively mimicking the expressive nuances of the human voice. Nangma by Chen, (1985) composed by Chen Gang, uses multiphonics and glissandi to emulate the ceremonial horn sounds of Tibetan Buddhist music

(Small, 1998).

"For the first time, we could think more about musicality than about messaging." — Participant D

The innovation phase marks a shift from political representation to aesthetic exploration, paving the way for pluralism.

6.2.3. Pluralistic Phase (1991–2024)

In the post-reform period, Chinese oboe compositions began to reflect pluralistic identities and global musical influences. Composers in this phase embraced atonality, multi-sectional freedom, and extended techniques, shifting away from nationalist didacticism to introspective and abstract expression.

Extase II (1996) by Qigang Chen (1997) exemplifies this transformation. Built upon the folk tune Sanshilipu, the piece deconstructs and reassembles the theme using twelve-tone technique, fragmentation, and dramatic registral shifts. Rather than conveying a political message, the composition interrogates the very nature of cultural memory.

"The oboe here is no longer a Western instrument or a Chinese symbol. It becomes something in between—personal, poetic, plural." — Participant J

This phase highlights a turn toward transcultural hybridity, wherein the oboe becomes a vehicle for negotiating modern identity through sound.

Table 2: Representative Compositions and Key Characteristics by Phase.

| Phase | Representative Work | Primary Innovation | Musical Techniques |
|------------|---|---|---|
| Adaptation | Red Lilies Bloom Vibrantly (1966) | Political folk adaptation | Binary form, triadic harmony, pentatonicism |
| Innovation | Nangma (1985), Three Sketches... (1979) | Ethnic vocal imitation, modern form | Trills, glissando, polytonality, imitation |
| Pluralism | Extase II (1996) by Qigang Chen | Abstract cultural synthesis and fragmentation | Atonality, multiphonics, free structure |

This table summarizes representative compositions from each of the three major historical phases in the development of Chinese national oboe works. Each piece reflects a shift in institutional conditions, cultural aesthetics, and composer agency.

The Adaptation Phase relies heavily on politically safe folk material arranged within Western harmonic structures. The Innovation Phase introduces more formal complexity and stylistic borrowing from ethnic traditions. In the Pluralism Phase, the oboe is no longer confined to a nationalistic voice but becomes a medium for transcultural negotiation, blending local memory with modernist abstraction.

6.3. Thematic Categories from Grounded Theory

To complement the musical data, twelve semi-

structured interviews were analyzed using grounded theory methodology, following Charmaz's constructivist approach.³³ Through open, axial, and selective coding, five recurring thematic categories were identified. These themes reveal the sociocultural dynamics underlying the development of national oboe compositions in China, and how composers negotiate their aesthetic roles under shifting historical regimes.

Each theme emerged from cross-generational interviews with composers, performers, and scholars, highlighting the interaction between institutional structures, cultural pedagogy, and individual creativity.

The following table presents a synthesis of the five primary thematic categories that emerged through grounded theory analysis of expert interviews.

Table 3: Thematic Categories Emerging from Grounded Theory Analysis.

| Theme | Description | Illustrative Quote |
|--|--|--|
| Institutional Regulation | Influence of state policies, cultural campaigns, and conservatory curriculum | "In the 1960s, we composed with one eye on the audience and one eye on the Party." |
| Pedagogical Transmission | Intergenerational teaching and folk performance traditions | "I learned folk tunes by singing them as a child, not from a book." |
| Cultural Continuity through Innovation | Use of new forms and techniques to preserve identity in modern settings | "Glissando doesn't erase the folk it deepens it in modern terms." |
| Performer-Composer Agency | The dual role of composers as cultural curators and innovators | "Sometimes, as performers, we 'rewrite' the piece in how we play it." |
| Instrumental Identity Construction | How the oboe is reimagined as a national voice beyond Western origins | "The oboe had to speak Chinese, even if it had a French accent." |

These categories reflect not only the aesthetic and technical evolution of Chinese national oboe composition, but also the broader institutional, pedagogical, and cultural conditions shaping musical creation. Each theme is supported by illustrative quotations, offering insight into how composers articulate their roles as both inheritors and reinterpreters of Chinese musical identity. This table summarizes the sociocultural and creative frameworks that underlie the development of Chinese national oboe compositions, as perceived by key stakeholders across three generations. Each category represents a critical component of the grounded theory model developed in this study. Together, they illustrate how musical practice operates at the intersection of institutional constraints, cultural transmission, and personal innovation, resulting in a dynamic and hybridized

oboe repertoire.

6.4. Quantitative Trends

In addition to thematic insights, the study also performed a quantitative analysis of 49 Chinese national oboe compositions created between 1946 and 2024. The goal was to empirically trace the evolution of musical attributes across historical periods, identify measurable stylistic shifts, and assess the degree of compositional innovation over time.

The analysis focused on five core dimensions: tonality, structural form, thematic content, technical features, and political or abstract narrative presence. Each composition was coded into discrete categories and grouped by the three established historical phases: Adaptation, Innovation, and Pluralism.

Table 4: Frequency of Key Musical Features by Historical Phase.

| Feature | Adaptation (1946-1976) | Innovation (1977-1990) | Pluralism (1991-2024) |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Number of Works | 17 | 18 | 14 |
| Use of Pentatonic Scale (%) | 88% | 67% | 43% |
| Use of Atonality / Non-tonal Modes (%) | 0% | 11% | 43% |
| Binary or Sonata Structure (%) | 76% | 66% | 29% |
| Use of Free or Multi-sectional Form (%) | 6% | 22% | 64% |
| Political or Ideological Themes (%) | 65% | 33% | 0% |
| Abstract or Personal Themes (%) | 0% | 22% | 78% |
| Use of Multiphonics / Glissando (%) | 0% | 6% | 71% |
| Use of Ethnic Instrument Imitation (%) | 0% | 17% | 36% |

This table presents a frequency breakdown of nine key musical attributes across three phases of Chinese national oboe composition. The data show clear longitudinal trends: a decline in politically driven themes and pentatonic tonality, and a corresponding rise in experimental structure, abstract content, and extended techniques such as multiphonics and glissando.

The findings from the frequency analysis in Table 4 indicate a clear and compelling evolution in the

compositional character of Chinese national oboe works over the span of nearly eight decades. One of the most salient shifts lies in the treatment of tonality. In the early Adaptation Phase (1946-1976), over 85% of compositions relied on the pentatonic scale, a sonic signifier closely aligned with traditional Chinese musical aesthetics and ideological appropriateness. However, this tonal foundation gradually eroded in later periods, giving way to modal variation, polytonality, and eventually atonality, which

constituted nearly half of all pluralistic works composed after 1990. This tonal transformation suggests a broadening conceptualization of “national sound,” one no longer confined to traditional scalar systems but inclusive of transcultural and experimental modalities.

Parallel to this tonal shift is the marked change in structural design. Early works typically adhered to binary or sonata forms, reflecting both pedagogical conservatism and ideological control. As China’s cultural climate liberalized in the post-Mao era, composers increasingly adopted multi-sectional and free-form architectures, allowing for greater thematic fluidity and personal expression. By the Pluralistic Phase, nearly two-thirds of works abandoned rigid classical forms in favor of compositional openness, facilitating a new kind of narrative articulation.

Furthermore, the narrative content of oboe compositions underwent significant evolution. In the Adaptation period, musical themes were explicitly aligned with nationalistic and collectivist ideals, often glorifying agricultural life, military valor, or socialist construction. These themes steadily diminished in later phases, replaced by abstract or introspective topics, including regional landscape evocations and metaphysical reflections. The rise in personalized and symbolic expression reflects the emergence of the composer as a cultural agent, rather than a representative of state ideology.

Crucially, these thematic and formal developments were accompanied by increased technical sophistication. Extended performance techniques, including multiphonics, glissandi, and ethnic instrumental imitation, were entirely absent in

early works but became increasingly prevalent from the late 1970s onward. Their widespread adoption in recent decades reveals not only an expanding pedagogical infrastructure but also a growing technical agency among Chinese oboists and composers.

Statistical Correlations To further validate these stylistic observations, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated across selected compositional variables. The results underscore a series of statistically meaningful relationships. First, there exists a strong inverse correlation ($r = -0.76$) between the prevalence of political or ideological themes and the use of complex structural forms, suggesting that aesthetic experimentation and narrative control may be functionally incompatible under strict ideological regimes. Second, a positive correlation ($r = 0.81$) was found between the use of extended techniques and the presence of abstract or personalized thematic content, indicating that technical modernity is frequently employed as a vehicle for non-representational or symbolic expression. Lastly, the study revealed a moderate-to-strong correlation ($r = 0.69$) between the chronological period and the degree of compositional freedom, confirming that temporal progression aligns with increasing aesthetic and technical liberalization.

Together, these statistical relationships reinforce the study’s grounded theory model, demonstrating that the stylistic evolution of Chinese national oboe composition is not merely a function of artistic preference but is deeply embedded in the institutional, pedagogical, and socio-political matrices within which composers operate.

Table 5: Selected Pearson Correlations Among Compositional Variables.

| Variable Pair | Pearson r | Direction | Interpretation |
|--|-----------|-------------------|---|
| Political Theme Presence ↔ Structural Complexity | -0.76 | Strong Negative | More political content is associated with simpler musical structure |
| Use of Extended Techniques ↔ Abstract Thematic Content | +0.81 | Strong Positive | Abstract or symbolic themes tend to employ advanced techniques |
| Chronological Phase (Time) ↔ Compositional Freedom | +0.69 | Moderate Positive | Later periods show increased structural and thematic openness |

This table summarizes key Pearson correlation coefficients calculated between selected compositional variables. The data support the hypothesis that stylistic evolution in Chinese oboe works is significantly influenced by the interaction between institutional control, aesthetic intent, and technical possibility.

6.5. Predictive Modeling Using Multi-Layer Perceptron Neural Network (MLPNN)

To augment the descriptive and correlational

findings, this study employed a Multi-Layer Perceptron Neural Network (MLPNN) to model the complex, non-linear relationships between platform components and perceived outcomes in national oboe composition. The MLPNN was selected due to its robustness in detecting non-linear patterns, multi-dimensional dependencies, and hidden feature interactions, particularly well-suited for cultural and stylistic variables that do not behave in strictly linear ways.³⁴

The target variable in this model was a compositional hybridity score, coded based on a rubric encompassing tonality, structural openness, use of extended techniques, and thematic abstraction. The input variables included tonal system type, structural form, theme category, and technical elements (e.g., multiphonics, glissando, imitation,

etc.). The dataset was split 80:20 into training and test sets.

The MLPNN model demonstrated strong classification performance, with an AUC (Area Under Curve) ranging from 0.603 to 0.915, depending on feature combination and phase.

Table 6: Predictive Power of Musical Features on Compositional Hybridity (MLPNN Model).

| Input Feature | Relative Importance Score | Interpretation |
|--|---------------------------|---|
| Use of Multiphonics / Glissando | 0.89 | Strongest predictor of hybrid/modern composition style |
| Structural Form (Free vs. Sonata) | 0.83 | High freedom in form correlates with hybridity |
| Thematic Type (Abstract vs. Political) | 0.76 | Abstract and symbolic themes enhance stylistic complexity |
| Tonal System (Atonal vs. Pentatonic) | 0.72 | Atonality contributes to hybrid musical identity |
| Use of Folk Material (Traditional vs. Reinterpreted) | 0.60 | Recontextualized folk sources support hybridity |

This table presents the feature importance results from the MLPNN model trained to predict compositional hybridity. Importance scores indicate the relative contribution of each musical feature to the model's predictive accuracy. The model confirms that technical and structural innovation are stronger predictors of hybridity than thematic content alone.

The model's outcomes align with and extend the correlational findings from Section 4.4. Specifically, the use of multiphonics and extended techniques emerges as the most reliable predictor of compositional hybridity. Structural freedom (non-sonata, non-binary forms) also plays a critical role, suggesting that form and sound technique are better proxies of innovation than surface-level thematic categories. Moreover, the MLPNN reveals non-linear interactions between features: for instance, atonality has limited impact in isolation but significantly amplifies hybrid identity when combined with abstract themes and glissando use. These results underscore the interdependence of innovation dimensions in Chinese national oboe composition. In practical terms, this model offers a tool for quantifying artistic complexity and tracking stylistic evolution through objective metrics a methodological advancement in the field of musicology and digital humanities.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1. Chronological Phases and Evolutionary Trajectories

The present study systematically traced the evolution of Chinese national oboe compositions

across three historical phases: Adaptation (1946–1976), Innovation (1977–1990), and Pluralism (1991–2024). The findings confirm a clear chronological progression marked by shifts in compositional purpose, aesthetic vocabulary, and technical articulation.

During the Adaptation Phase, the oboe was primarily used as a vehicle for nationalistic expression, mirroring the ideological imperatives of the Maoist era. The prevalence of pentatonic scales, binary and sonata forms, and folk-song adaptations served to anchor the Western oboe within Chinese traditional musical discourse (Yung et al., 2010). These works reflected a top-down model of cultural creation, where aesthetic innovation was subordinated to state messaging.

The Innovation Phase emerged in response to post-Cultural Revolution liberalization, whereby composers began to explore ethnic diversity, regional musical idioms, and personal expressivity. Techniques such as glissando, polytonality, and ethnic vocal imitation marked this era as a period of experimental revival. Rather than rejecting traditional sources, composers re-contextualized them within modern frameworks. This finding aligns with Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity, where post-colonial identities are constituted through negotiation rather than erasure (Wong, 2001).

In the Pluralistic Phase, compositions transcended national boundaries and embraced global modernist practices. The integration of atonality, multi-sectional structures, and extended performance techniques such as multiphonics signaled a mature

stage of transcultural synthesis. Importantly, the oboe ceased to be merely a localized Western instrument and became a symbolic site for aesthetic pluralism. This aligns with recent scholarship in transcultural musicology, which asserts that contemporary national music no longer seeks to define a fixed identity but instead curates fluid cultural narratives (Yung et al., 2010)

7.2. Cultural Policy, Pedagogy, and Creative Autonomy

A key insight of this study is the dynamic tension between institutional frameworks and creative agency. Grounded theory analysis of expert interviews revealed that compositional development was not linearly determined by policy, but emerged from the interplay between cultural regulation, pedagogical inheritance, and individual innovation. For instance, composers in the early phase composed under constraints yet “coded” political messages within folk idioms, reflecting subtle negotiations of meaning (Participant A).

In contrast, during the Reform era, pedagogical reforms allowed new generations of composers to reclaim regional and ethnic aesthetics, thereby restoring expressive range. This observation complements Ostrom’s theory of commons governance, where community-level knowledge systems manage and preserve shared cultural resources (Zhou, 2023). Recent work by Hendriks et al., (2023) (extends this notion into contemporary ethnomusicology, suggesting that pedagogical institutions are not just transmitters of musical content but arenas where cultural identity and resistance are continuously redefined (Zhou, 2023).

The research also highlights how music conservatories played a pivotal role in shaping compositional norms. Curricular shifts from ideology-centric training to technical and stylistic experimentation equipped composers with tools to transcend political dictates. Thus, pedagogy is not merely a conduit of skill but a site of ideological transformation.

7.3 Localization of the Western Oboe

Perhaps the most striking finding concerns the instrumental identity transformation of the oboe. Initially foreign to Chinese music, the oboe was localized through technical reconfigurations (e.g., pitch, articulation, phrasing) and symbolic reconstructions. The adaptation of folk melodies into oboe sonatas functioned as a symbolic gesture of cultural ownership, akin to what Appadurai described as “indigenization of the global.”

(Appadurai (1996).

This process of localization was not static. In later decades, the oboe became a site of performative hybridity, where its French origins were neither erased nor dominant. Instead, the oboe’s voice was reimagined to “speak Chinese” with its own inflection. Qigang Chen’s *Extase II* exemplifies this, as it fuses traditional melodic fragments with atonal structures and contemporary performance techniques. This supports Jenkins’ participatory culture theory, in which users (here, composers) repurpose global tools to express local meanings (Jenkins, 2006).

Recent ethnomusicological work has expanded on this phenomenon, arguing that instrumental localization is increasingly shaped by post-digital mediation, algorithmic influence, and AI-informed performance analysis (Cowley, 2025). These studies highlight how the symbolic identity of Western instruments such as the oboe is now negotiated not only through cultural institutions and pedagogy but also via digital affordances, cross-cultural remixing, and real-time algorithmic interpretation. In this light, the Chinese oboe becomes more than a national adaptation; it serves as a liminal instrument, embodying what Zhang & Wu describe as “networked instrumental hybridity (Atanasovski, 2024).

7.4 Grounded Theoretical Model of Identity Formation

Drawing upon grounded theory, this study developed a five-dimensional model that captures the dynamic interaction between structural and agentic forces in the formation of compositional identity within the Chinese national oboe repertoire. The five core dimensions institutional regulation, pedagogical transmission, cultural continuity through innovation, performer-composer agency, and instrumental identity construction emerged from triangulated qualitative data and compositional analysis.

This study basically describe the nature of the reciprocal relationships between structural and agentic forces in the formation of compositional identity in Chinese national oboe repertoire. Its five dimensions include institutional regulation, pedagogy transmission, cultural persistence by innovation, agency by performer-composers, and invention of instrumental personality. These have been formed by triangulation of qualitative data and compositional analysis. The proposed model goes beyond available research in the integration of cultural, institutional, and creative elements and

provides a more holistic and evidence-based outlook on the aspects of instrumental identity formation.

This model illustrates that musical style is not solely a matter of personal taste or technical capacity, but rather the product of historically situated negotiations among policy, pedagogy, and artistic intention. The framework thus challenges traditional binaries in musicology particularly the dichotomy between "state-controlled" and "autonomous" art by foregrounding how composers strategically navigate institutional constraints to exercise aesthetic agency.

This view resonates with Rendall's concept of "tactical creativity," where individuals maneuver within imposed structures to reclaim authorship (Bhabha, 2012). It also aligns with Foucault & Gordon's notion of productive power, which posits that regulation does not merely repress but also produces new discourses, identities, and aesthetics (Foucault, & Gordon, 1980).

Furthermore, the model confirms and extends prior ethnomusicological studies that highlight the interdependence of institutional systems and cultural production. For example, Witzleben, (1995) noted how conservatories in China function not only as training grounds but as ideological arenas, where debates over tradition, modernity, and innovation are played out through curriculum, repertoire, and evaluation criteria. This study builds upon that foundation by showing how pedagogical inheritance particularly the oral transmission of regional folk idioms shapes compositional decisions, even in works employing avant-garde techniques.

The dimension of performer-composer agency also builds upon Small's theory of "musicking," where performance is not simply interpretation, but a social act of meaning-making (Small, 1998). Interview evidence from this study reveals that many composers also perform and revise their works in situ, thus blurring the line between composition and improvisation, a process akin to participatory authorship.

Lastly, the model's emphasis on instrumental identity construction contributes to the growing literature on instrumental semiotics and symbolic reterritorialization (Liu, 2002). In the Chinese context, the oboe has been not only technically adapted but also culturally reimagined as a voice capable of articulating both historical memory and modern hybridity.

7.5. Contribution to Transcultural Instrumental Studies

This study contributes significantly to the evolving field of transcultural instrumental studies,

offering new insight into how Western instruments, once culturally and geographically distant, can be recontextualized to express localized and hybridized identities. The transformation of the oboe in Chinese national music, from an orchestral import to a symbolic medium of national expression, offers a compelling case study of instrumental indigenization and post-national musical identity.

This contribution aligns with and builds upon a growing body of scholarship that explores how instruments are not static carriers of culture but adaptive agents in processes of cultural negotiation. For example, Wong and Bates have emphasized the role of instruments as symbolic actors that mediate between tradition and modernity, particularly in Southeast and Central Asian context (Liu, 2002). Similarly, Nooshin has discussed how Western instruments in Iran were repurposed within local modal systems, redefining both timbre and meaning in culturally resonant ways.

In the Chinese context, scholars such as Witzleben (1995) have studied the transformation of indigenous instruments within institutional frameworks, but few have addressed how Western instruments are nationalized and hybridized over time. This research extends those findings by focusing on the oboe, a relatively under-examined case and demonstrating how its stylistic flexibility allowed it to serve both ideological functions during the Maoist period and aesthetic functions in the post-reform era.

Importantly, the study shows that transcultural instrumental identity is not a byproduct of globalization alone but is often the result of conscious artistic and pedagogical intervention. The use of regional vocal imitation, folk motifs, extended techniques, and atonal structures in contemporary Chinese oboe compositions illustrates how composers deliberately craft a polysemic sonic identity, where the oboe becomes neither strictly Chinese nor purely Western, but a site of mediated cultural hybridity.

This is consistent with Bhabha's theory of the "third space," wherein cultural products emerge not from pure origins but from the productive collision of difference. It also reflects Awerman and Kastowo's recent work on musical pluralism in Asia, which calls for a shift from binary models of tradition vs. modernity to frameworks that acknowledge fluid, overlapping identities in sound production (Kastowo, 2020). Moreover, the study contributes methodological innovation to the field through the integration of AI-based modeling (MLPNN) in the analysis of compositional features. This follows

recent trends in computational ethnomusicology Ji (2020) which emphasize the potential of machine learning tools to support not replace humanistic interpretation. In this case, the model validated stylistic hybridity as an outcome best predicted by a combination of form, technique, and abstract thematic orientation, confirming that transcultural identity is structurally encoded, not merely discursively claimed.

Thus, this research affirms that instruments, much like genres and composers, are active participants in transcultural processes. The Chinese oboe repertoire serves as an exemplary model for how artistic systems engage in creative translation, retooling global materials to speak with a locally resonant yet globally legible voice.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Regardless of its interdisciplinary nature and a mixed methods design this study has a number of limitations. The sample is not that large (n=12) despite being stratified based on the generations, and this can restrict the generalizability of the interview results. The choice of 49 compositions might be too broad since there is a chance that lesser-known pieces might have contributed to an even deeper expansion of analytical results. In addition, oral or improvised performance cannot be submitted because of the dependence on available scores. Although the MLPNN model provides a predictive analysis, its findings are limited because of the subjectivity of expert coded variables. Future studies should include larger datasets, analyses taken during live performances and inter-cultural and comparative case studies to enhance the context of understanding.

9. CONCLUSION

This study has chronologically and analytically mapped the evolution of Chinese national oboe composition over the period 1946–2024, identifying three transformative phases Adaptation, Innovation,

and Pluralism each characterized by unique stylistic and sociocultural parameters. By integrating compositional data, grounded interviews, and machine learning, the study confirmed that oboe composition in China is a site of cultural negotiation, shaped by political contexts, pedagogical traditions, and aesthetic innovation. The oboe, as both a Western import and a localized instrument, has become a symbol of transcultural identity, reflecting broader dynamics of post-national artistic practice. This research contributes to scholarly understanding of how instruments migrate, mutate, and manifest new meanings across cultural contexts. It also offers a grounded theoretical model that connects compositional style with institutional, pedagogical, and symbolic processes.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Diversify institutional support for experimental and hybrid compositions, especially in conservatory settings.
2. Integrate transcultural composition techniques into music curricula, emphasizing creative adaptation over replication.
3. Support cross-cultural performance workshops that allow traditional musicians and Western instrumentalists to co-create.
4. Encourage composers to further explore non-linear forms, polytonality, and multimodal improvisation.
5. Performers should be trained in extended techniques (e.g., multiphonics, pitch bending) and ethnic vocal imitation, enabling broader expressive vocabularies.
6. Comparative studies could examine other Western instruments localized in non-Western contexts (e.g., saxophone in West Africa, violin in South India).
7. Future models may incorporate AI-assisted composition analytics, combining neural networks with symbolic music processing.

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